

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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R 130915Z MAY 75

FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3873

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY OSLO

AMEMBASSY ROME

USMISSION NATO

USCINCEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L BRUSSELS 04208

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MASS, BE

SUBJECT: GISCARD PROMISES TINDEMANS TO THINK EUROPEAN IF BELGIUM
WILL BUY MIRAGE

SUMMARY. BELGIAN FOREIGN MINISTRY INFORMANT SAYS THAT GISCARD MADE
GENERAL, NON-BINDING PLEDGES TO TINDEMANS TO MAKE SERIOUS EFFORT
TO PARTICIPATE IN FUTURE EUROPEAN JOINT WEAPONS PROJECTS IF BELGIUM
WILL BUY F-1 NOW. FRANCE HAD MADE A NEW PRICE OFFER WHICH MATCHES
"NOT-TO-EXCEED" PRICE OF F-16. INFORMANT SAYS BELGIANS MUST TRY
TO DEVISE A WAY TO PROVE OUT SERIOUSNESS OF FRENCH PLEDGES. WHILE
THE EUROPEAN PREFERENCE EXPLORATION WHICH BELGIAN GOVERNMENT HAS
LAUNCHED HAS DEFINITELY SLOWED DOWN DECISION-MAKING PROCESS HERE,
IT IS NOT YET CLEAR THAT IT WILL HAVE ANY REAL SIGNIFICANCE IN THE
END IN BELGIUM'S DECISION ON WHICH WEAPONS SYSTEM TO
BUY. END SUMMARY.

1. FOLLOWING IS WHAT EMBASSY REGARDS AS A FACTUAL AND
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APPARENTLY FAIRLY FULL ACCOUNT OF TINDEMANS-GISCARD DISCUSSION

OF F-104 REPLACEMENT ISSUE. WE ARE LESS THAN CERTAIN, HOWEVER, OF THE ULTIMATE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE "EUROPEAN PREFERENCE" EXERCISE NOW IN PROGRESS. NOR WOULD EVERYONE IN THE BELGIAN GOVERNMENT AGREE ON ITS MEANING. SOME SENIOR BELGIANS REGARD THIS AS A SERIOUS EFFORT TO MOVE EUROPE TOWARD INTEGRATION IN THE DEFENSE FIELD. OTHERS REGARD IT AS AN ESSENTIALLY MEANINGLESS EFFORT NECESSARY ONLY TO TAKE THE LAST PLAUSIBLE ARGUMENT AWAY FROM MIRAGE ADVOCATES. EMBASSY WILL CONTINUE TO REPORT AS DEVELOPMENTS WARRANT. AMBASSADOR HAS APPOINTMENT WITH PRIME MINISTER TINDEMANS MAY 14 WHICH MAY PRODUCE AUTHORITATIVE ESTIMATE OF SITUATION IN BELGIUM.

2. FOREIGN MINISTER'S CHEF DE CABINET (VAN BELLINGHEN) GAVE US TODAY A RUNDOWN ON GISCARD-TINDEMANS TALK ON F-104 REPLACEMENT MAY 9. HE SAID DISCUSSION WAS RELATIVELY BRIEF WITH GISCARD'S PITCH COMING DOWN TO THESE POINTS: 1) FRANCE HAS REDUCED F-1 PRICE TO THAT OF F-16'S NOT-TO-EXCEED PRICE AND IT WILL MEET ANY PRICE CUT F-16 PURVEYORS MIGHT OFFER; 2) FRANCE BELIEVES IN EUROPEAN PREFERENCE DOCTRINE AND BELIEVES IT SHOULD BE IMPLEMENTED BY EXISTING PROGRAMS, I.E., THE F-1/M53 PROJECT; 3) FRANCE PLEDGES TO GIVE SERIOUS THOUGHT TO PARTICIPATION IN MRCA VENTURE, SHOULD THAT WEAPONS SYSTEM PROVE TO BE FEASIBLE; 4) FRANCE IS INTERESTED IN EXPLORING MEANS OF FUTURE COOPERATION IN DEFENSE PROJECTS IN THE EC-9 FRAMEWORK.

3. ELABORATING ON THE FOREGOING, VAN BELLINGHEN SAID RE POINT 1 THAT FRANCE HAD PUT IN A NEW PRICE OFFER "LAST WEEK OR TEN DAYS AGO" WHICH BROUGHT F-1 COST DOWN TO F-16 COST. "SO THE PRICE FACTOR IS NOW EQUAL BUT THE F-16 OF COURSE IS A MORE INTERESTING AIRCRAFT IN PERFORMANCE AND TECHNOLOGY, VAN BELLINGHEN SAID.

4. ON POINTS 2 AND 3, VAN BELLINGHEN SAID THAT GISCARD'S POSITION BOILED DOWN TO A PROPOSAL THAT OTHER EUROPEAN COUNTRIES TAKE THE F-1 AND SETTLE FOR A NON-BINDING PLEDGE THAT FRANCE WILL SERIOUSLY THINK ABOUT JOINING MRCA PROGRAM SOMETIME IN THE FUTURE. HE SAID BELGIANS WOULD HAVE TO "FIND A WAY TO PIN THE FRENCH DOWN BECAUSE WHAT WE HAVE NOW IS JUST NOT GOOD ENOUGH". HE SAID BELGIANS WOULD LIKE TO USE THE MRCA PROJECT AS A MEANS OF PROVING GENUINENESS OF FRANCE'S VERBAL COMMITMENT TO EUROPEAN PREFERENCE PHILOSOPHY, BUT THERE ARE PROBLEMS. MOST IMPORTANT IS THAT

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MRCA EXISTS IN PROTOTYPE NOW, AS DOES F-1, BUT IT IS NOT CLEAR THAT IT WILL PROVE TO BE A VIABLE WEAPONS SYSTEM. HE SAID THERE IS REAL POSSIBILITY FRG WILL EVENTUALLY SCRAP IT AND TAKE THE AMERICAN F-15. HE SAID BELGIUM'S IDEA IS THAT FRANCE BE COMMITTED TO BUY A BATCH OF MRCA'S (IF THE AIRCRAFT PROVES OUT), TAKING UP THE SLACK WHICH WILL BE LEFT BY UK AND ITALY'S INABILITY FOR ECONOMIC REASONS TO ACQUIRE AS MANY COPIES AS ORIGINALLY PLANNED. VAN BELLINGHEN SAID THIS WOULD REALLY PUT THE HARD QUESTION

TO THE FRENCH BECAUSE IT WOULD MEAN SACRIFICING THE ACF, NOT THE F-1, THAT FRENCH AIR FORCE AND FRENCH INDUSTRY REALLY HAVE THEIR HEARTS ON".

5. VAN BELLINGHEN SAID IT WAS NO EASY THING TO DEVISE A WAY OF INSURING AGAINST EVENTUAL "CHEATING" BY THE FRENCH ON A COMMITMENT TO A REAL EUROPEAN DEFENSE INDUSTRY. HE SAID ADVOCATES OF EUROPEAN PREFERENCE DOCTRINE WOULD HAVE TO COME UP WITH A GOOD IDEA "SOON" WHICH HE LATER REFINED TO A "MATTER OF WEEKS". HE SAID NO MEETING OF THE SO-CALLED EUROPEAN PREFERENCE GROUP OF COUNTRIES HAS BEEN SCHEDULED, AND HE DID NOT KNOW WHEN THERE WOULD BE ONE.

6. ON POINT 4, E.E., THE POSSIBILITY OF SOME SORT OF FRENCH POLITICAL COMMITMENT TO COMMON DEFENSE OF EUROPE, VAN BELLINGHEN SAID CHIRAC WAS ADAMANT AGAINST FRANCE JOINING EUROGROUP AND GISCARD WAS NOT CHALLENGING HIM. HE SAID GISCARD HAD PROMISED TO EXAMINE POSSIBILITY OF COOPERATION IN THE EC-9 FRAMEWORK ON R AND D AND PROCUREMENT OF COMMON WEAPONS SYSTEMS-"TO CREATE A EUROPEAN MILITARY-INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX SUCH AS EISENHOWER WARNED AGAINST," SAID VAN BELLINGHEN. HE SAID TROUBLE WITH THAT UTTERANCE OF GISCARD WAS THAT IT TOO WAS VAGUE AND ESSENTIALLY NON-COMMITTAL. BUT, HE EMPHASIZED THAT TINDEMANS AND BELGIAN GOVERNMENT AS A WHOLE DO NOT LOOK AT GISCARD WITH THE SAME JAUNDICED EYE AS THAT THEY CAST ON HIS PREDECESSORS. TINDEMANS REGARDS GISCARD AS A MAN GENUINELY COMMITTED TO THE CONCEPT OF EUROPE, HE SAID, AND HIS STATEMENTS WERE NOT DISMISSED AS JUST "SALES TALK."FIRESTONE

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